

‘Seūx-mang’: A Missing Link of Southern Thai Dialect and Pa Yang Community in the South of Thailand

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Abstract

This study investigates a lost word in oral language in the Southern Thai dialect called ‘Seūx Mang’ by using qualitative multi-methods research such as unstructured in-depth interviews, focused group discussions, observations and social networks from 30 key informants. The sample included an abbot, community leader, ranger and old people from Pa Yang and Songkhla City. In addition, documentary evidence was used in the study. The results indicated that elderly people are the last generation who know the meaning of ‘Seūx Mang’ and even they use the same word of ‘Mang and Seūx Mang’ to denote different meanings in Southern Thai dialect only. “Mang” refers to prudent or indecisive or early morning while ‘Seūx Mang’ means to a sub specie of panther. Moreover, further study revealed that this specific word links to the loss of a fertile homeland which once belonged to Pa Yang Community and their proud history.

Keywords: Seūx Mang, Southern Thai dialect, Panther, wisdom of elders, localization,

Introduction

While engaging in community profile work at Pa Yang Village, Tha Change Sub district, BangKlam District, Songkhla Province, Thailand for the past few years, we came to know several new and interesting stories in which a new word called ‘Seūx Mang’ was included. However, the importance attached to this particular word made us interested in exploring the origin of this word. The word ‘Seūx Mang’ is associated with the history of the Pa Yang community and what we discovered from the old people in Pa Yang village is completely different from what the government has reported about Pa Yang community development plan. Moreover, when asked about ‘Seūx Mang’ from many Southern Thai people who can speak southern dialect very well but none of them had not even heard about it. Given this situation of the meaning of ‘Seūx Mang’, we then tried to analyze this word semantically to verify the meaning of this word on the basis of syllables.

‘Seūx’ in Thai language means to a tiger while Mang is a word, derived from Southern Thai dialect, which means thoughtful, meticulous or sometimes it can mean indecisive. Another way we used to trace the origin of this word by using the knowledge of Pa Yang elderly people. A few old people from Songkhla suggested a clue as to how this word has originated. According to their perception, the origin of ‘Seūx Mang’ can be ascribed to a Southern Thai dialect idiom which says,

“*Phattalung Chang Gang, *Songkhla Mange,*Trang Yon, *Nakhon Room”

“Phattalung Chang Gang is similar to Phattalung people + Chang Gang

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'Chang Gang' is a phrase belonging to Southern dialect which means courageous or unflattering people, or in another word, one who is not scared of others. A local myth has to say that in the past, Phatthalung used to have a monument of Mr.Chang Gang who was brave enough to defeat anyone in a fight.

However, later, some people destroyed the monument fearing that other locals would learn to act or behave like him in their community. It was furthermore revealed that Phatthalung, in the past, used to be a land of gangsters. (Yuthong & Seng Utai. 2015)

Songkhla Mang = Songkhla People + Mang

Mang in Southern Thai dialect means cautious, tarry, dare to making a decision, hesitant (Yu Thong, 2015)

After interviewing another group of Southern Thais who could understand the meaning of 'Mang' came out with following meanings:

Kanit Puttagoon means to "*Cogitate, consider*"

Paitoon Sirirak means to "*Not rash, think carefully, cautiously*"

BoonKrong Kanthagoon means to "*inhibit*"

Nakhon Pat Sri Rueng(2012) means to "*consideration, carefully*"

But most of the Southern Thais that we interviewed was not aware of this word

However, in terms of phrase, 'Songkhla Mang', which means Songkhla people are mostly studious and discreet because Songkhla province is a hub of political, education, transportation and commerce.

For "Trang Yon" = Trang people + Yon

Yon is Southern Thai dialect which means instigate, provoke. So, Trang people inspire others to work or do something while they are behind.

"Nakhon Room" = Nakhon is an abbreviated word for Nakhon Sri Dhammarat people + Room

Room is Southern Thai dialect means rally, muster, conglomerate, or positively can mean to group oriented. It can further mean trust or strong relationship in the same group and help each other when a group member has to fight with another group. This was believed a dominant behavioral characteristic of Nakhon Sri Dhammarat people. As is clear from the description above, the meaning of Mang cannot be ascribed to a tiger. Therefore, we decided to continue our inquiry into this particular word by contacting the people from Pa Yang community where we assumed that the origin of this word must have lost and this can be considered as the background of our qualitative study.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are two folds:

1. To trace the history of the wild cat known as 'Seūx Mang' that has become extinct in the history of the south.
2. To elaborate the exact meaning of 'Seūx Mang' as per Sothern dialect.

Research Methods

In this study, qualitative research framework which consisted of face-to-face interviews, online group chat as primary research tools while secondary instruments consisted of searching various websites, journal articles, newspapers and books. 30 key informants chosen for this study included an abbot, old villagers from Pa Yang community, and old people who know the word "Mang", community leaders, religious leaders, folks with philosophical perception, people who were in the forest and knew about it well, rangers and people who have seen 'Seūx Mang' and know the meaning of that word. They were selected using Snowball technique.

Pa Yang Context

Pa Yang is located at Moo.9, Tambon Tha Chang, Amphoe Bang Klam, in Songkhla province, Thailand. It is adjacent to Tha Chang district municipality, only 6.3 kilometers and not far from Prince of Songkla Hospital & University and Department Stores. Moreover, it is very close to Southern Industrial Estate and Hat Yai International Airport just about 10 kilometers away. Given the location of the Pa Yang village, it can be considered as a Peri-urban area. However, if we consider other facilities such as roads, water supply, electricity, Internet, and the way of life of people there, then the characteristics of Pa Yang is quite similar to a rural area even though the infrastructures facilities in this village have already have improved. This is to emphasize that a school, a health promotion center, and a Buddhist monastery are available in this village but many roads in the village are still in a dirt condition.

As a result, the public transport has still been problematic for this community. With regards to basic sanitation, there are two water supply projects, but many people still draw water from the wells, both shallow and artesian wells.

Communication using modern technological innovations poses problem for the community as there is no access to internet. Telephone service providers have not taken any positive step towards providing the community with communication facilities such as land line telephones or mobiles. This area is not covered by any telephone provider except AIS Company whose coverage still needs widening. People in this community mostly rely on agriculture where they work especially in rubber plantations. This area occupies 4,550 rai of forest and 98.9% has been allocated for rubber plantations. Others tend to work in fruit gardens such as Durian, Long-kong and Santol. In 2002, people here had a high family income of which the average was about 50,001-100,000 Baht per year per each household. However, 190 households or 86% of the total population had taken debts in 2002 and most of their loan sources were from Savings' group, Agriculture Bank, or Cooperatives and local groups (Khwansuk, 2002). Now, there are 9 informal groups (Savings for production group, Marketing Demonstration Center group, the Rubber sheets group, the Fertilizer group, Village fund group, the Elderly group). 25 years ago, after forest was destroyed, there was a severe drought which affected the people in this area severely and as a result, they lacked water even for drinking. However, as a solution to water problem, local people had to ask for artesian wells to be constructed from the government to obtain water for their daily use. As of now, the main problem they have been facing for the past few years is related to the decline of the Agricultural yields, especially the price of latex which has directly impacted their income in a high cost of living condition. Many of them do not have enough income to meet their daily expenses. In terms of awareness of the community identity, most people know only "Yang" which means 'Para Rubber tree' and the history which was recorded in the village development report of the local government (Ban Pa Yang Development Committee, 2016). Young generation is not aware of the history of their village and what position it occupied in the past. Only a few elderly people who could remember the old stories of the village do still remain and once they are gone, there will be none to relate those stories. The second question which is related to the meaning of 'Seūx Mang' is discussed below.

After interviewing several elderly people, a 73-year-old, Abbot of Pa Yang temple, some old men, old inhabitants, and rangers, we could clear our doubt about 'Seūx Mang'. According to them, 'Seūx Mang' refers to a type of tiger that used to inhabit in Pa Yang which was abundant of variety of plants, animals, water sources, and other natural resources in the past. The name of the community 'Yang is not derived from "Para Rubber" but it has been derived from Yang (Gurjan). Garjan is a native plant that belongs to the Dipterocarpaceae family such as *Dipterocarpus alatus* Roxb. and *Dipterocarpus turbinatus* Gaertn which were abundant here before clearing the forest for timber business, tin mining, shifting cultivation and the supply of wood for steam engines as fuel. It was not only the trees that were felled in the forest but also a sub-species of a leopard which they used to call 'Seūx Mang' was also killed so that people could work in the forest with no fear. Due to the clearing of this forest, the tiger found no safe place to live and it went into extinction. The next section will describe how the evidence relevant to the vanished tiger (Seūx Mang) was recorded from local people.

Search for evidence of existence of a tiger in the Pa Yang community

Recorded literate reports no information about this tiger except the elderly community of Pa Yang who knows that the word "Seūx Mang" was used to call a tiger that inhabited in the forest of Pa Yang many years ago. We also know that it is one kind of tiger, but nobody knows which one it is. In order to identify which tiger is referred to as 'Seūx Mang', we printed out the pictures of all species of tigers which inhabit in the forests and jungles around the world and showed to several old people in the Pa Yang community to see whether they could identify which one was 'Seūx Mang'.

One old community member of Pa Yang had the following to recount about the tiger:

"Originally, Pa Yang was a fertile tropical rain forest. There were many types of woods, herbs and wildlife such as Mang or Seūx Mang, Bengal tiger, elephant, gibbons, fresh water for human use but now all have disappeared from this land after a saw mill and, tin mining project were established. Also, the steam train in the past used charcoal as fuel and to make charcoal, lots of trees from the forest were felled"

When inquired about what 'Mang' was? He said, "Mang is a word that belongs to Southern Thai dialect which means early morning around 2-3 a.m. while 'Seūx Mang' refers to a tiger which was mostly active around 2 to 3 a.m. in the morning.

But it disappeared after a sawmill and a Tin mining industry were started here” He said that he saw the ‘Seūx Mang’ for the last time when he was 14 years old.

With these evidence, our next interviewer was the chief abbot of Pa Yang temple who recalled a similar story as that of the previous informant. He said *“In 1977, I first came to Pa Yang village and then, there were many types of big trees, this area has plenty of wild animals which I could observe from the temple. The wild animals included gibbons, elephant also stories of Bengal and ‘Mang’ tigers were told by villagers”*

In order to verify the authenticity of what the previous informants recounted, we contacted an agricultural scholar, a rubber planter and a former forest officer who were from the outside of the Pa Yang community. However, it was found that nobody had ever seen this particular tiger including the former forest ranger who confirmed that he had seen all other wild animal except ‘Seūx Mang’.

Therefore, we next decided to show old community of Pa Yang the photos of all types of tigers we had printed out to see if they could identify or say which one was similar to ‘Seūx Mang’. On seeing the pictures, of all types of tigers in print, none of them could identify and said that ‘Seūx mang’ was not among the pictures. Some of them pointed to the leopard and said ‘Seūx Mang’ was similar but smaller than a leopard. However, one villager said that he used to shoot ‘Seūx Mang’ as it was in the habit of attacking his cattle. He further confirmed that it was not very big and did not have white stripes on its body and its color was dark honey while another villager claimed that ‘Seūx Mang’ could climb just half trees to frighten and hunted gibbon.

Another interesting account of ‘Seūx Mang’ was revealed by an 80 years old woman who had seen it said: *“I saw ‘SeūxMang’ with my own eyes and it was there by the side of a small anthill in the rubber plantation. It was a dog-sized cat and it had reddish black fur. At that time, some little children who had seen it called for help. Later, it was chased away by beating an aluminum pot with a stick”*.

An old forest ranger who lives in a nearby village recounted his experience with Seūx Mang as follows: *“Mang or Seūx Mang or Kang Koodwas refers to a Panther. It was like a big cat. The size was similar to a big dog and it weighed about 50-70 kilograms. It had a long tail around 80 centimeters long. It could climb trees but not as high as Leopards could. Sometimes, we had seen in dark yellowish brown or golden with black spots. Although there were different species, we mostly found the black one here. The fur was soft and thick. We called it “Mang” because it always came to drink water at streams in the early morning. At night, we could see them on mountains or hills. They hunted red jungle fowls (Gallus gallus), wild or field rats, muntjacs (muntiacus family), deer, chevrotains, or monkeys, gibbons, wild buffaloma (Bubalus arnee/Bubalus bubalis), wild boars and black giant squirrels. Normally, it didn’t attack humans unless it was provoked. Few of them used to eat cattle, dogs, or poultry of villagers. It could scare the dog and had the ability to spring on it from the distance of three meters away from its pray. Once in 7 years, it gave just 1 cub. Only old people who are now older than 60 years and who used to be in the forest might know about this big cat.”*

The anecdotal evidence we gathered from villagers of Pa Yang confirm that there lived a wild cat resembling to a leopard which people used to call him ‘Seūx Mang’ in the forest of Pa Yang in the past but it is no longer found anywhere in the southern part of Thailand or in any part of Thailand as it has already faced extinction due to human interaction with their natural habitats.

Date comparison and making inference of meaning of ‘Seūx Mang’

The information and data gathered from villagers from interviews and using other tools to ascertain the authenticity of ‘Seūx Mang’ suggests that ‘Seūx Mung’ is a sub-species of leopard native to continental South and South-East Asia.

It is interesting to note that the word ‘Seūx Mung’, which refers to leopard or panther belongs to Southern dialect. This leopard used to inhabit in the forests of South of Thailand which include the villages of Ban Pa Yang, Bang Klam, and Songkhla. In addition, this sub-species of leopards was found in Malaysian forests in the past.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the evidence, the researchers could arrive at a conclusion that ‘Seūx Mang’ was a sub-species of leopard that used to inhabit in the forests of Pa Yang village before 1992. However, this specific sub-species of leopard is no longer in existence in Pa Yang village or in the southern part of Thailand.

Most of the informants in the Ban Pa Yang community are now older than 60 years and only older generations have seen and heard about 'Seūx Mang'. With the disappearance of the forests, this sub-species of leopard had faced extinction from the South of Thailand causing the word 'Seūx Mang' too loose from the vocabulary of Pa Yang community forever. The current study related to 'Seūx Mung' helps us to reflect the degree to which humans have been ungrateful to their natural surroundings in which they used to live in the past in harmony with the nature. Deforestation, shifting cultivation and felling trees for the economic development of people in a given area, has resulted in losing natural diversity in the past community of Ban Pa Yang, Tha Chang and Songkhla. The researchers, however, hope that this study will help those interested in conducting research about Southern Thai dialect or lexical attrition in the future. As Chantavanich (2014) has stated that it is necessary for a sociologist or an anthropologist to gain an insightful understanding about historical data of a society so that they will be able to know how to link events or phenomena to one another. Given that what Chantavanich has stated the importance of understanding historic events of a given society, we would like to inform the readers and specifically those who are concerned about formulating development policies relevant to economic development and implementing them should be wary of both positive and negative consequences that can impact on communities before implementing them. Losing a single word or phrase from a dialect may be trivial to some policy makers, but such a loss can negatively affect a community and the diversity of the world will become problematic for the whole world in the future.

Limitations of the study

The current study which investigated the loss of a single word from Southern Thai dialect has some limitations. The first one can be ascribed to the limited number of informants while the second limitation is that there are no written records that can support the view that there existed of a sub-species of leopard called 'Seūx Mang' in the forests of the South of Thailand. Given these two limitations of this study, researchers wish to inform the readers that they should consider that this report is to provide them with information about the loss of a word in Southern Thai dialect as well as sub-species of a leopard that used to inhabit in the forests of the South of Thailand several decades ago. Further research is needed to investigate whether the word 'Seūx Mang' existed in Southern Thai dialect and it was used to call a sub-species of a leopard so that one can make more informed decision about it.

Conclusion

In summary, the study reported above was conducted with a sample of 30 participants who represented a cross section of the southern elderly community of Thailand and it employed a qualitative research framework in which multi-methods (in-depth interview, observation, focused group discussion, picture identification and documentary evidence) were included. The findings suggested that there existed a word called 'Seūx Mang' in the Southern Thai dialect which was used to call a leopard that inhabited in the forests of Pa Yang and other adjoining villages in the Southern province. As a result of clearing the forest, the habitat of 'Seūx Mang' was lost and finally it vanished from the southern forests leaving no trail and 'Seūx Mang' disappearance resulted in losing the word 'Seūx Mang' from the Southern Thai dialect which can be regarded as lexical attrition on the part of Thai dialect.

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